

LABEL HOLDER

This is a complete application claiming benefit of provisional application Serial No. 60/438,007 filed January 6, 2003.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**Field of the Invention**

This invention relates to price channels of the kind frequently used at the front of merchandise shelves in supermarkets 10 and the like for attaching pricing labels, or signs pertaining to the merchandise on the shelves.

Steel merchandise shelves frequently are made with a C-shaped channel along the front edge in which labels or sign holders can be fitted. Where such shelves are formed without a channel, plastic 15 fittings can be added to the shelves to provide such channels. Price channels can generally be used to accommodate snap-in price labels and sign holders or smaller adhesive backed labels.

When price channels are used, as above, for labeling merchandise on a shelf, no significant problems arise for shelves 20 which are at a convenient viewing height for a customer. For shelves near floor level, and shelves above eye level, however, customers have trouble in reading price channel labels because the labels are generally vertically oriented.

Discussion of the Related Art

One known form of extruded plastic snap-in label holder is seen in commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. 5,394,632 issued March 7, 1995 (the '632 patent) and illustrated herein in Figures 1-3. This prior art label holder 10 provides labeling panel 12 oriented at an angle when the price channel is fitted on a lowermost shelf 18 of a set of supermarket or the like shelves as seen in Figure 3 so that a label is more readily viewed by a customer.

The known label holder 10 includes a rearwardly and downwardly extending leg 14 and a projecting barb 16 at the top of the labeling panel 12. When snapped into an existing C-channel of a metal shelf 18, the barb 16 engages behind the upper lip 20 of the C-channel, the tip of leg 14 engages behind the lower lip 22, and the labeling panel 12 is angled upwardly. As seen in the '632 patent, the price channel 10 can be inverted and snapped into a C-channel on an uppermost shelf to angle the labeling panel downwardly to facilitate viewing from below.

As is well known, label holders of this type are commonly provided with a co-extruded clear plastic front cover 24 providing a means whereby non-adhesive labels can be retained against the labeling panel. The label holder 10 of the '632 patent splits the lower lip 12b to enable the channel to hold labels behind the cover

and sign holders between the lip 12b at the bottom of the labeling panel 12 and the lip 17 at the top thereof.

More recently, combination label/sign holder have been developed wherein labels can be selectively inserted and removed 5 from the label holder pocket without removing any of the sign holders associated with related products on a merchandising shelf. Such a construction is seen in commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. 6,568,112 issued May 27, 2003 (the '112 patent), the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference. The 10 sign holder portion of the combination label/sign holder of the '112 patent is carried by, and moves with, the cover member of the label holder, avoiding interfering with access to the label holder pocket. This is accomplished by providing the front surface of the cover member of the label holder with a pair of sign holder-receiving lip members which can snappingly receive edge portions of 15 a resilient plastic or metal sign holder such as seen in the '632 patent or commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. 5,488,793 for the engaging portions of a depending sign holder of the type seen in commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. 5,682,698 and 6,163,996, the 20 subject matters of all of which are incorporated herein by reference, or other such commercially available sign holders.

For simplicity, the term "label holder" as used herein and in the appended claims is intended to include products which may or may not incorporate a sign holder according to the '112 patent.

Commercially, different merchandisers use sets of product shelves having different integral C-channels along their front edges. The most extensively used shelves of this nature are known in the art as the Lozier shelf, the Madix shelf and the Streater shelf. The C-channels of each of these shelves include the equivalent of an upper, downwardly depending lip and a lower, upwardly extending lip for receipt of upper and lower portions of fit-in accessories such as the label holder of the '632 patent. However, the distance between these lip members, as well as the angle provided by the lip members, are different in each of these types of shelves. While the price channel of the '632 patent can be engaged in the C-channels of each of the Lozier, Madix and Streater shelves, the engagement may be less than secure because of the differences in the spacing between the upper and lower lip members of these shelves, and the relative inflexibility of the rearwardly extending leg 14 which, as seen in Figures 1-3 of the '632 patent, extends generally at a right angle from the rear of the labeling panel 12 and arcs downwardly therefrom providing little adjustability to accommodate C-channels of different dimensions. Moreover, when engaged in the C-channels of the

different shelf units, the angle of presentation of the label is significantly different from the angle of inclination of a label engaged directly in the C-channels of such shelves. In many instances, this change in the viewing angle makes it more difficult 5 for a customer or the like to read the information on a label carried by the price channel.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of this invention to provide a plastic or 10 label holder of the general type described wherein the effective length of one of the C-channel engaging portions, namely the leg extending rearwardly from the back of the labeling panel, is inherently adjustable to accommodate the different dimensions of the Lozier, Madix and Streater merchandising shelves and to enable 15 the label holder portion thereof to follow the angle of the shelf channel and maintain the label holder portion snug against the shelf in a secure manner.

Another object of this invention is to provide a universal or highly versatile label holder or combination label/sign holder 20 wherein the rear leg does not extend outwardly and downwardly directly from the rear of the labeling panel, but first extends upwardly and then downwardly toward the rear of the labeling panel to provide a spring-like action to the rearwardly extending leg,

enabling the same to adjust its effective length to accommodate the different dimensions of the C-channels of various shelf sets and to ensure that the label holder portion follows the intended angle of the C-channel of a particular shelf.

5 Yet another object of this invention is to provide a resilient C-channel engaging rear leg on the labeling panel of a label holder, and to incorporate opposing lips on the front surface of the cover member to provide means to carry a sign holder in a manner that does not interfere with the opening of the cover member
10 10 to replace or remove labels from the pocket formed between the labeling panel and the front cover.

Additional features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the ensuing description and claims read in conjunction with the attached drawings.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are included to provide a further understanding of the invention and are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of
20 the prior art and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Figure 1 is a sectional view of a prior art label holder of the type seen in the '632 patent;

Figure 2 is a sectional view of the prior art label holder of Figure 1 fitted into a C-channel of a merchandising shelf;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of a set of merchandising shelves with a label holder of the type seen in Figure 1 engaged in 5 the lowermost shelf close to floor level for upwardly-angled viewing of labels carried thereby;

Figures 4-6 are schematic side elevational views of the prior art label holder of Figure 1 engaged, respectively, in a Lozier, a Madix and a Streater shelf;

10 Figure 7 is a sectional view of a label holder modified according to the instant inventive concepts and incorporating integral sign holder lips on the cover member as described in the '112 patent; and

15 Figures 8-10 illustrate the manner in which a label holder or combination label/sign holder according to the instant invention fit within the opposing lips of a C-channel in the Lozier, Madix and Streater shelves, respectively.

Like reference characters refer to like parts throughout the several views of the drawings.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to Figure 7, a combination label/sign holder according to a preferred embodiment of this invention is designated

generally by the reference numeral 30 and comprises a labeling panel 32 with an upwardly projecting barb 34 and a forwardly projecting locking lip 36 similar to the elements seen in the '632 patent. A co-extruded clear plastic front cover 38 provides a 5 pocket 39 whereby non-adhesive labels (not shown) can be retained against the front surface of the labeling panel 32 in a well known manner. Although the instant inventive concepts do not require the incorporation of a sign holder of the type seen in the '112 patent, upper and lower lips 40, 42 may be integrally formed on the cover 10 member 38 to form pockets 44, 46, respectively, for reception of engaging portions of a sign holder in the manner discussed in the '112 patent.

An upwardly and outwardly extending finger engaging element 48 may be provided to facilitate disengaging the upper portions of the 15 cover member 38 from behind the locking lip 36 when it is desired to open the label holder 30 for replacement or removal of a label (not shown) from the pocket 39.

The combination label/sign holder 30 seen in Figure 7 includes 20 a rearwardly extending leg 50 which is significantly different from the rearwardly extending leg 14 of the prior art price label holder 10. It will be noted that the upper portions 52 of the leg 50 initially extend upwardly from the rear surface 32a of the labeling panel 32 in an arcuate fashion and then turned downwardly to form

a leg 54 which is angled inwardly toward the rear surface 32a of the labeling panel 32 and which terminates in a lower tip 54a adapted to engage in the lower, upwardly opening, lip of a C-channel when the upper tip 34a of the barb 34 is engaged in the 5 upper, downwardly opening, lip of the C-channel.

Figures 4-6 show the manner in which the prior art label holder 10 engages respectively in a Lozier shelf 60, a Madix shelf 70 and a Streater shelf 80. These figures are to be compared to Figures 8-10 showing the manner in which the label/sign holder 30 10 of Figure 7 engages in Lozier, Madix and Streater shelves of the same construction.

As seen in Figure 8, the distance between the upper lip 62 and the lower lip 64 of the Lozier C-channel 66 is on the order of 1.171 inches, whereas, for the Madix shelf 70, the distance 15 between the upper lip 72 and the lower lip 74 of the C-channel 76 is 1.111 inches and for the Streater shelf 80, the distance between the upper lip 82 and the lower lip 84 of the C-channel 86 is 1.197 inches. While, obviously, there are differences among Lozier shelves as well as Madix shelves and Streater shelves based on 20 manufacturing tolerances, these dimensions are given as illustrative. It should be understood that, neither the dimensions of the shelves nor the dimensions of the price channel combination label/sign holder of this invention, are not critical to the

instant inventive concepts and can vary significantly without departing therefrom. Of significance, however, is that there is generally a difference in dimensions of the C-channel of these three commercial merchandising shelves.

5 As seen in Figures 4-6, the prior art label holder 10 has only limited flexibility and may accommodate these relatively small differences in C-channel dimensions. However, this limited resilience in the rearwardly extending leg 14 may result in a relatively unstable engagement in particular C-channels whereby the
10 price channel can be easily dislodged if accidentally engaged. Moreover, as will be clearly seen from Figure 4-6, the design of the label holder 10, with particular reference to the rearwardly extending leg 14, causes the angular presentation of the labeling panel designated " α " in each figure to be significantly different
15 from the angular presentation " β " of data of a label shown in dotted lines at 90 that would be carried directly by the C-channel of the respective shelves. This differential angle distorts the intended presentation of the different merchandising shelves which may make it difficult for customers to view information on labels
20 carried by the prior art label holder 10.

In contrast, with reference to Figures 8-10, it will be seen that the angle of the labeling panel 32 of the label holder 30 is

quite similar to the angle "B" of the C-channels 66, 76 and 86, respectively, of the Lozier, Madix and Streater shelves 60, 70 and 80.

Thus, the labeling panel 32 of the label/sign holder 30 of 5 Figure 7 closely parallels the C-channel of the various shelves whereas the labeling panel 12 of the prior art label holder 10 is significantly increased by the relative inflexibility of the rearwardly extending leg 14. In the label/sign holder 30, the upwardly arcuate portions 52 of the rearwardly extending leg 50 is 10 easily flexed to move the lower tip 54a of the leg portion 54 upwardly, as necessary, to accommodate smaller C-channels and thereby provide a secure engagement in C-channels of any of the Lozier, Madix and Streater shelves. This adjustability also permits the labeling panel 52 of the label/sign holder 50 to 15 closely parallel the presentation angle of each of the Lozier, Madix and Streater C-channels thereby avoiding distortion of the label information presented to the customer.

It will now be seen that there is herein provided a label holder or a combination label/sign holder which is universal in 20 that it can readily accommodate different commercially available merchandising shelves and presents information on labels carried thereby to the consumer at an angle consistent with the intended angle of the different merchandising shelves.

The foregoing descriptions and drawings should be considered as illustrative only of the principles of the invention. As noted, the invention may be configured in a variety of shapes and sizes and is not limited by the dimensions of the preferred embodiment.

5 Numerous applications of the present invention will readily occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, it is not desired to limit the invention to the preferred embodiments or the exact construction and operation shown and described. Rather, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to falling 10 within the scope of the invention.